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Monday, January 21, 2019, 7:44 am

By:

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At tomorrow night's meeting, the East Lansing City Council is set to consider and possibly vote to pass an "Economic Development Strategic Plan."

The aims include making redevelopment easier in East Lansing, supporting existing businesses, and attracting new ones. The overall idea is for the City to take a more conscious, aggressive approach to economic development.

A main impetus for passing a formal Economic Development Strategic Plan is to get East Lansing certified as a "Redevelopment Ready Community" (RRC) by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). According to the MEDC, being certified an RRC constitutes a formal recognition that your community has a vision for the future and the fundamental practices in place to get there.

Once a community is certified, it is given access to additional technical assistance from the state and opportunities to showcase the community to potential developers.

East Lansing's Community and Economic Development Administrator Tom Fehrenbach laid out the draft version of a Economic Development Strategic Plan for East Lansing at City Council last week. Staff took comments from Council and have provided a revised version [2] that is on the Council's business agenda this week [3]. That marks it for likely action.

The mission statement of the draft Strategic Plan is: "Enhance the physical and community environment of East Lansing and provide support services for businesses that promote the virtuous circles necessary to sustain a high quality of life for our community." The following graphic is provided as illustration:



The draft of the Economic Development Strategic Plan spells out East Lansing's goals for economic development (including RCC certification) and the best way to reach them. These include:

Expanding and diversifying the tax base:

The City indicates that it wants to accomplish this in part by focusing on specific development projects like Park District, the Hub, City Center, and Park Place. But of these projects, only the

Hub project has been designed without a tax increment financing (TIF) plan that, for years, funnels new tax dollars for reimbursement of project-related costs.

The Park Place developers are still revising their TIF request [4] and it has not yet gone through review, but as of last week, Vlahakis Development and Royal Apartments were looking for a \$15 million tax incentive plan that would last eleven years for Park Place. In the case of Park District, the channeling of taxes into development-related costs is set to happen for nine years. For Center City, real estate taxes are set to pay for project-related costs for 30 years.

The draft strategic plan also indicates a desire to streamline the review process for redevelopments, to "strengthen relationship[s] with property brokers and owners," to adopt form-based code [5], and to allow Planning staff to do more approvals than currently permitted.

The plan also calls for focusing on analyzing and "activating" redevelopment opportunities by keeping a fresh list of available properties and giving updates on use availability of City- and DDA-owned properties, and leveraging "MSU's strength in applied sciences."

The document suggests new partnership with the Lansing Area Economic Partnership (LEAP). East Lansing had pulled out of LEAP previously to save the \$15,000 per year membership cost.

Create a "Vibrant, Authentic City and Downtown District":

There's a lot of development happening or planned for downtown in the coming years, and the City hopes to use some of that to attract a more age-diverse group of residents in the area. (Currently, the downtown population is overwhelmingly made up of MSU students.)

The City's brownfield sites would also get some attention under the new plan, and East Lansing would continue to apply for MDEQ and EPA grants and utilize TIF. The plan also calls for supporting downtown festivals, trying to bring office users downtown, and improving downtown amenities.

Deploy Strong Communications and Marketing Techniques:

As economic development flourishes, City leaders want to see East Lansing professionally branded, and they want to see adequate advertising to go along with it. This includes continuing to produce East Lansing Buzz [6] to keep residents up to date on construction.

The City also sees strengthening the partnership between the Downtown Management Board and the Downtown Development Authority as key to producing better communications material and marketing content. Staff want to meet more with local business owners and managers.

The plan calls for investigating whether the MEDC's "Michigan Main Street" model [7] would work for East Lansing. That program "assists communities interested in revitalizing and preserving their traditional commercial district." It calls for "capitalizing on downtown's history and identifying the unique assets of the community itself."

Develop "More Active Business Nodes":

The city would like to create a master plan specifically for the Trowbridge Corridor. The other two

other areas the plan identifies as ripe for growing ?business nodes? are the Northern Tier and the area around Costco. For the redevelopment around Costco, East Lansing envisions partnering with Meridian Township.

How to weigh in:

The draft strategic plan is available here [2]. Citizens who want to weigh in on it can speak at City Council?s public comment period, which comes shortly after Council starts at 7 p.m. on Tuesday in the courtroom upstairs in City Hall. Citizens can also write to City Council via email [8].

Update: City Council voted 4-0 in favor without discussion (other than thanks to staff), passing the plan.

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